1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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The clans are of basic importance. They are the largest units of solidarity, and open conflict never occurs within them, as it would not between a man's clan and his wife's and mother's clan. It is through his clan that a man establishes his totemic relations and identifies himself with the sacred world by virtue of a mystical experience of his father. The mother is supposed to be spiritually fertilized by the entrance into her uterus of the infant's soul when it has come from the child's father's totemic well. Many ethnologists have insisted that the Australian aborigines have no knowledge of physiological conception. Although I held this opinion during the first part of my field work, I later came to the conclusion that knowledge of procreation is general to the Murngin but is considered of little importance.[4]

The blood feud is forever present and tends to kill a sufficient number of young men to allow the system of polygyny[5] to function. The Murngin have developed a number of well-constructed types of warfare which form dramatic episodes in the several chains of feuds linking the dead generations of the past to those of the living.

The moiety[5] is a still larger unit than the clan, dividing the sixty-odd clans into two groups which intermarry. By the device of the moiety, the whole of the life of the Murngin, as well as nature, is placed in two opposing groups called Yiritja and Dua.

A final important structure in Murngin society is the age-grading[5] institution. It divides, first, the men from the women (see page 131, Age Grading) on the basis of those who are initiated into the mysteries and those who are not, and then redivides the men on an age-graded scale based primarily on the place a man achieves within the rest of his social organization through *rites de passage*.

Within this social configuration the life of each Murngin male goes through an exact cycle. The first life crisis occurs when the Murngin soul, through the father's mystic experience, leaves the totemic well and enters the womb of the mother. By circumcision around the age of six to eight years the individual passes from the social status of a woman to that of a man. When at about the age of eighteen he achieves parenthood and is shown his totems for the first time, he goes to another, higher status; and to a still higher when, at about thirty-five, he sees the high totems. At death he passes through a very elaborate mortuary rite, returns to his totemic well, and the circle is complete. The personality before birth is purely spiritual; it becomes almost completely profane or unspiritual in the earlier period of its

[4] See pages 23-25.
[5] See Glossary of Technical Terms.

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761 life when it is classed socially with the females, gradually becomes more and more ritualized and sacred as the individual grows older and approaches death, and at death once more becomes completely spiritual and sacred. This is the life of all Murngin men. A woman, on the other hand, passes out of the sacred existence of the unborn to the profane existence of the born and living, and back again to the sacred existence of the dead; but little sacred progress is made during her lifetime.

562 Obviously the principle of the social bifurcation of the sexes has been
561 used to create the lowest status, that of women and children. The women's group remains comparatively undifferentiated, while the men's group becomes highly segmented and graded through participation in the totemic mysteries. The age-grading structure largely controls the degree of participation a man has in his society. The older men exercise their control largely through their power to say whether or not a man can go from one age grade to another. It is only they who possess the knowledge which makes up the totemic ideology.

561 The participation of a Murngin in the age-grading structure revolves around, first, his position in the immediate family structure, and, secondly, his place in the ceremonial mysteries. The life of man is divided into a number of stages marked by the *rites de passage*. The life crises of an individual, including birth, maturity, and death, are set off by elaborate rituals. These rituals correspond roughly to a man's position in the family structure. When he is circumcised he moves out of his family of orientation[6] into a men's camp; and at the time he creates his own family, that of procreation,[6] he moves into higher age grades by seeing his totems in a series of rituals. Chart I, page 11, expresses in summary fashion the relation of man's place in the social organization to his place in the age-graded ceremonial life.

562 The first principle of age grading, the sexual bifurcation by which
155 women are excluded from participation in the totemic mysteries, immediately limits female behavior in the society and tends to simplify their personalities. The man's social personality, on the contrary, expands and becomes more complex by his participation in the various elaborate age-graded rituals. There seems to be considerable evidence for a relationship between this and a man's comparatively complex technological behavior and a woman's more simple type. The Murngin man handles more complicated tools and weapons, and uses more complex techniques in making and using them than does his female kinswoman;

[6] See Glossary of Technical Terms.

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also have spatial expression. Vaguer local groups, bands, or phratries group together certain clans within one moiety. 614

The tribe is almost a non-existent unit among these people. Its most explicit element is a dialectic unity, but even here the linguistic variation within small local groups is very highly developed. The organized tribe with the use of chiefs does not exist. The tribe is not the war-making group nor does it enforce law. 619 197

It has long been the theory of a great number of anthropological authorities that magic is an individual phenomenon, whereas religion is a social phenomenon. The Durkheim or French school of sociology has been in agreement with this general point of view, although its members differed radically from the American, English, and German schools in their interpretation of religion. Although I am in general agreement with the social interpretation of religion by Durkheim, I cannot follow him or his school in his separation of magic from religion. It is another thesis of this book that magic is also as much a "church" in the Durkheim sense as religion. A test situation is available in this region because, although the peoples of the northern area believe in magic, they have no magicians such as are found in the south. Their substitution of ordinary religious rituals reveals much about the nature of magic. 121

The social mechanisms which are placed in operation within the group by the spread of the knowledge that a black magician has stolen a man's soul, that is, successfully operated on a man, are presented and analyzed in the chapter on magic. When magic is believed to be functioning, all the members of the society act in a manner exactly opposite to the ordinary in their relations with the unfortunate victim. This means that instead of helping to sustain the individual and allowing him to function as a normal person, these protective devices are withdrawn and the attitude is taken that the man is "half dead" and will shortly die. The effect upon the suggestive individual, it is contended in this book, is sufficient to set up certain psycho-physiological reactions which tend to destroy him. When this individual becomes very ill, the movement of social withdrawal from him ceases, and pressure is then applied through mortuary rites which perform the function of attempting to remove him from the society of the living to that of the dead, further destroying his desire to live and frequently bringing about his ultimate death. 761 764

The sacred world of the Murngin is totemically conceived; each individual by virtue of his clan membership possesses and belongs to 771

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561 562 which center in the men's ground and overflow during parts of the rituals into the general camp where her world is centered.

The principle of sex, then, has been used to organize a status group, with the women and small children of either sex in one group and the initiated men in another. The women's group remains ritually undifferentiated in a status sense except for a tendency to give women near 562 888 or in the menopause preference over younger women in those ceremonies in which women participate. For example, in the Gunabibi the old women beat the ground to stop Muit, and in the Djungguan it is felt to be more appropriate and effective for older women to dance around the warngaitja than for men to do so. This corresponds with the lifting of part of the feeling of taboo around the mother-in-law after she loses many of her secondary sexual characteristics and "gets to be an old woman and looks all the same as a man."

561 761 Murngin age grading is largely a religious phenomenon consisting of a series of rites of passage from one age group to another in the life cycle of the individual. It seems, therefore, nearer the truth of Murngin thought to treat the life of the individual as the complete entity it appears to be in the thought of the culture. Each Murngin's beginning is in the sacred totemic well of his ancestors, and each Murngin's end is within the same subterranean depths. His first status is that of the unborn child in the form of a small fish which exists with others of his kind beside the totemic spirits of the clan, the totemic mythological ancestors, the ancient clan dead, and those who have recently died. He [626] is under the control of his ancestors and the totem, and his passage from the world of the unborn to that of the living depends on the good behavior of his parents, particularly of his father. The Murngin think of this from the parents' point of view and conduct their lives more carefully because of the fear of childlessness.

561 761 787 851 The Murngin baby comes from the totem well through a religious experience of the father, since it is the father who is in touch with the totem world of which the mother is supposed to have no knowledge. The father's mystical dream experience is itself a kind of rite of passage of the unborn and begins the child's socialization. The father's announcement to the mother of the child's arrival (frequently, it must be admitted, after she has reported her pregnancy to the father, who has kept silent, he says, to test the validity of his experience) changes the father's age-grade status. It removes certain ritualistic food taboos and definitely establishes his place in the older men's group. This means, then, that the father-child reciprocal functions as a unit: the

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consummation of his family of procreation through his first child's "birth" effects the father's spiritual birth into a recognized higher status in the community age grouping, and simultaneously the new being is taken into the lowest age grade.

As an old man, the Murngin learns the final mysteries of life by seeing the most esoteric of the totems. Ultimately he dies and assumes a new social status, and by the mourning rite of passage enters his last social grouping, for he still retains a social personality of his own as long as he is in the memory of his group. His ultimate fate is loss of social personality when he is forgotten as an individual and remembered only as an undifferentiated part of a long line of clan ancestors and is absorbed in the general sacredness of the clan well. The sacred power of the clan well derives in part from the knowledge of the souls of the long and the recent dead dwelling within it. The dead soul, when it is ceremonially ushered into the totemic well, is a spiritual part of the man's or woman's participation in the land of the living. The woman's spiritual existence, although not primary and direct as thought of by the Murngin, is nevertheless real and identifiable, for she has a number of sacred totemic names known to her father and brothers, she comes from the totemic water hole as a fish, and vicariously, and to some extent directly, participates in all the sacred totemic rituals. Her partial participation in these rituals which are enacted outside the men's ground also gives her a certain amount of ritualization.

As a man becomes more deeply integrated into his daily community life, that is, when he becomes old enough to go on expeditions as a responsible member of the blood feud and to be held accountable by the enemies of the clan as a part of his group, and when he marries and has children and extends his kinship personality by primary contacts, he at the same time grows deeper and deeper into his esoteric existence and becomes more deeply learned in the rituals and the sacred language.

A review of the chapter on economics and technology quickly convinces one that men make and use the greater number of the more complex tools, weapons, and implements. If all the complexities of the technological apparatus as a part of the society's adaptation to its natural environment were charted, each process receiving a line symbolizing its part in the general technical behavior, it would become apparent that the greater the complexity of the technology, the greater the participation of the men in it, and the simpler the technological processes, the more women participate. There is a possible correlation

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CHAPTER VII

MURNGIN MAGIC AND MEDICINE

DESCRIPTION OF MURNGIN MAGIC, WITH DETAILED DATA

A. Introduction

Among all the clans of the eight tribes and all the members of the groups there is a profound belief in magic. The effects of its power are twofold: it can harm and destroy, or it can benefit and cure. Among the northern clans of the Murngin and Yaernungo tribes there is a belief in magic but there are no magicians of any kind, while among the southern and more western tribes magicians, both evil and good, are found everywhere. The "black" magician (sorcerer) can injure or kill his victim, and the "white" magician can cure him or restore his lost faculties. All deaths, sicknesses, certain types of bad luck, and, in general, all those occasions on which the individual is seriously out of adjustment with his community, physically, mentally, or socially, are looked upon as the effects of black magic; and in almost every case except that of soul-stealing the white magician is called in to remedy the situation.[1] There is here a kind of warfare between the forces which do good and those which do harm to man. The latter are related to an organized set of concrete techniques embodied in the person of the black magician, while an entirely different set gives practical expression, in the personality of the white magician, to those forces which control the effects of black magic. The struggle then becomes a warfare between these two types of magical personalities. This does not mean that they are necessarily enemies, though they usually are; furthermore, a black magician is not looked upon by all men as fearsome: to those of his own group he is a constant source of strength, since they seek his aid in repaying a wrong done to them by another group.

Occasionally when a very old person dies the diagnosis is, "It was nothing, just old age"; but this is very rare. Among some of the magical causes are: the machinations of an evil magician; possession by an

[1] Whenever a magician, black or white, is called upon, payment must be made to him.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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evil ghost (mokoi); and ritual uncleanliness. Their effects can be cured by: ritual; white magic; and very occasionally, natural remedies. We shall first describe black magic and the sorcerer, then white magic and the healer, and finally analyze these concrete data in order to determine the nature of Murngin magic. To do this we shall first examine the internal evidence presented by the activities of the black and white magicians in the southern areas in the hope that we shall thus illuminate our understanding of the functions of magic. We shall next consider the northern area, which is without magicians, comparing it with the southern area to ascertain if this test situation throws any light upon the nature of magic and its possible relation to ritual and religion. After this we shall apply our findings to the theories held by Hubert, Mauss, and Durkheim,[2] particularly to their theory that magic is an individualistic technique without a church, therefore different from and antithetical to religion, the fundamental basis of which is its church organization. The last section of the chapter will present a sociological interpretation of black and white magic which will take account of all the Murngin magical data, demonstrating that magic is a part of religion and, like it, has its church.

B. Black Magic and the Sorcerer

The Murngin believe in a number of methods by which sorcerers can kill their victims. One of the more popular ideas is that the magician goes secretly into the bush and makes a long turtle rope, brings it near the camp, and hides it in preparation for the magical slaying of a tribesman. In the middle of the night or early morning he and an accomplice approach the camp where the one they intend to kill is asleep. They crawl up near him. One takes the rope, makes a loop in it, and slides it over the victim's head, lying down beside him so as not to be observed by anyone who might be awake; or, if the victim should waken, to make him believe the magician is one of the victim's wives. If all goes well, he pushes the rope around the sleeping man's neck. Meanwhile, the accomplice holds the opposite end of the rope some few paces away from the main camp. He has been told before that as soon as a pull is given on the rope, the cord will have been properly adjusted. The helper starts twisting the rope while the other sneaks to him. He continues to twist it until he starts

[2] Durkheim, Émile, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (trans., J. W. Swain), The Macmillan Company, New York, 1926; Hubert and Mauss, "Théorie Générale de la Magie," *Année Sociologique*, Paris, Vol. VII.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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but he could kill only one, even though there were a herd of kangaroo there. The taboo of silence is placed on the man from the time he eats the gondjurma shavings until he is successful in the hunt "because it means you have the soul inside you and when you spit it goes out into the water. You can't talk or it would send him out before."

"One time," said an informant who had in his possession a killing stick he intended using, "I was down at the creek trying to catch fish. When I got there I saw Bang-gi-la. He had one of these sticks with him. He was ready to try it when I got there. He had not used fish poison. I looked at the end of the stick. It had been scraped. While I stood there the fish came to the top and were dead. I am going to try mine."

The dry heart's blood can be used in the same way and the magical process is exactly the same. "Wet blood is no good because it makes you sick. When you take wet blood you must keep it until it gets dry."

The stick insect, a creature which looks much like a praying mantis and is one of the minor totems among the western clans of the Dua moiety, is associated with the killing stick primarily because it has a stick-like shape. It is believed that dead souls are about it, and at times it is called wan-djuk by the western peoples, which means black magician. Its correct name is war-a-la war-a-la. It is believed that the warala warala sometimes helps sneak up on people and kill them. There is an ambivalent attitude taken toward this creature. The natives play with him when they see him hanging sluggishly to a limb, laugh at him, treat him rather roughly, yet in their more serious moments they speak of his association with black magic.

The power of the black magician and his technique and the power of relics used to harm one's enemies (a variety of black magic) find their source in the sacredness of the dead. It is the mana of the dead which gives this power to magic and which *is* this power. To the living, the greatest and most intense dysphoria which finds expression in the life of man is death. The more dead souls that cluster about the evil point of the killing stick, the more power the killing stick possesses; a punitive war expedition assures itself of success by the magic clustered in the power of the bone relic because the soul is with it. The ordinary living animal or fish is killed immediately by the magical power of the killing stick because the soul of the dead is associated with it. The dal of the magician is the dal of the dead. The relics express this same power because they are associated with the dead. A relic cannot kill, but it can remove many of the traits of the living

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and make a living man more like the dead. A man goes to sleep because a bone has been put in the fire by him and he is killed by his enemies (see the account of a clan feud in the war chapter). A man cannot run when chased by his enemies because one of them is blowing on a dead man's bone in his mouth, or an evil soul enters a man's head and makes him crazy, the power of the soul coming from that of the dead.

The two classes, that of the totem and of the dead, are but two varieties of one general type, for both of them belong to the world of the sacred. Their power is contagious and dangerous unless properly handled by ritual. The totem can cause sickness and death just as the power of the dead can produce these same effects.

The Behavior of the Individual and the Society When Magic Is Put into Effect

The isolation of the various elements in the particular social configuration surrounding the death of a victim of black magic may help illuminate the fundamental nature of Murngin magic and explain its potency and unusual effectiveness; and a general analysis of the group behavior under such a situation will be profitable.

When the supposed theft of a man's soul becomes general knowledge, the sustaining social fabric pulls away from the victim. The familiar attitudes of the kinship personalities change, the collaboration of the victim and his society, of which his social personality has always been an integral part, ceases. The group now acts with all the ramifications of its organization and with countless stimuli positively to suggest death to a suggestible individual. The ordinary daily activity of the victim's social life is removed. The society itself creates a situation which, if unchanged, makes it impossible for the individual to adjust himself to it even though he tried; and in addition he usually not only makes no effort to live and to remain part of his group but actually, through the multiple suggestions from it, cooperates in his withdrawal therefrom. He becomes what his society's attitudes make him, committing a kind of *suicide*. The social configuration in which he finds himself operating at this time is one of anomia[2] for him. His ordi-

[2] Emile Durkheim, *Le Suicide*, Librairie Felix Alcan, Paris, nouvel edition, 1930. In general, anomic suicide is a type supposed to be due to the change in the society which surrounds the individual and gives him a feeling of maladjustment and of being "lost." The change here, however, is more dynamic than one of process; that is, the society as a functioning structure regularly performs this act upon individuals whose souls have been stolen, rather than that the society changes in a structural way and becomes something different from what it was before and by so doing causes the indi-

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moments, there is little organization of the people to give general community expression. A kind of disorganization has occurred. The women wail, but it is not the organized wailing which one finds in some of the rituals. There is a hesitancy and uncertainty about the actions of the people. The more intense latent antagonisms rise to the surface and some of the relatives may be blamed for the death. For example, when a child dies it is often thought that the father and mother have had sexual intercourse during the later months of pregnancy, which are supposed to be a period of abstinence. The other relatives of the dead child express their antagonism by picking up their spears and attempting to throw them at the offending pair. In one sense this is an organized expression, since they well know that they will be prevented by other relatives from throwing the spears.

After the first wailing at the news of the spearing or sudden death of a member of the clan or of a near relative, a stillness comes over the camp which is very noticeable to anyone accustomed to the general noisiness of all the Murngin camps after dark when the people have eaten. It is at this quiet time that the people express their desires for revenge. A near relative throws a spear on the ground and lets everyone know that he is going to avenge the death, whether it has been caused by the spear of a known enemy or the black magic of an unknown antagonist.

The female relatives of the dead man cut their heads with stone knives or spears or sharp pointed sticks to show their great sorrow. The mothers, sisters, wives, and female maris are the relatives who show the greatest amount of grief and cut themselves the most. A few hours after the death of a man or woman the relatives belonging to his clan, led by the father if he is alive, paint the design of his clan well upon him. For example, if he were a Warumeri or Wangurri clansman he would have the duck well painted upon him. The painting and design are exactly the same as those placed on the body of a young boy when he is being circumcised, and on the body of an adolescent boy after he has seen his totemic emblem. Red ocher is painted all over the body first and then the totemic design is painted on the chest and abdomen and face. The hair is covered with white clay after most of it has been cut off or plucked out to be made into a sacred hair belt. "We pull out the hair of the dead man a few hours after he dies and put red ocher on his head after we do this. We make a hair belt from his hair and look for red parrot feathers to put on it.

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182 764 775 765 soul and because he has died by magic; these two concepts enter profoundly into Murngin thinking about their dead relative. As a soul he can be properly handled by ritual and translated back to the world of the dead, but as a victim of magic—and all the dead are such victims—he is very dangerous (see the chapter on magic). There are, then, a whole series of purificatory rites which serve to sever the dead's relationship to the living. They are of two varieties: the first is symbolically to force the separation from the living, and the second to propitiate the soul and tell it to go quietly to its totem well and not hurt the living. The second variety tends to prolong the ceremony as if the living people were loath to give up the soul to the dead. The first takes concrete symbolic form in the fire ceremonies which chase the soul away, the spider web dance which catches the soul, the pelican or net dance which does the same, and the removal from the group of the scapegoat who has carried the bones. In the second the songs express the indignation of the dead ancestors toward the living because the recently dead was not given better treatment and because the bones were retained by the female relatives.

182 765 The last primary motif in the mourning rites is found in the various symbolic rituals performed to reintegrate the society, close its ranks after the removal of one of its members, and once more assert its solidarity. Ceremonial food is gathered from the whole group and eaten in the sacred wells made over the deceased's grave and at various other times during the ceremonies. The entire group paints itself and participates in the communion. This general participation is also to prevent the magic which killed the dead from harming the living. The symbolic expression of group solidarity (if the writer's theory of magic is correct) prevents the harmful effects of magic from spreading.

182 764 761 The relatives of the dead cannot be in too great haste to dispose of the body or remove the soul from contact with the living, but neither can they keep the soul too long, ("don't be too angry with us,"—see page 417). In either case the ancestors would not like it and would be offended. The living relatives have an ambivalent attitude toward their dead relative. They feel the strong social bond they once had for him. There is a consequent desire to keep him a part of the living and with them, and there is at the same time a feeling of abhorrence and repugnance. The long mourning ritual expresses these contradictions of attitude.

182 765 The burial of the body for several months allows the emotions of

5: Webb M-5 (ca. 1930) 1934
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Magical Beliefs

[578] 754 A profound belief in magic enters very largely into the life of these people, and is a very fruitful cause of tribal quarrels and killings. The most important of these beliefs concerns magical killings by sorcerers known as "Ragalk."

According to this belief, the Ragalk, having selected his victim, or having been commissioned by another to bring about the death of a certain individual, waits until he finds this man alone, out hunting or passing between camps, and, seizing him, soon reduces him to a condition of unconsciousness. Then, making a deep incision into the thorax, he thrusts in his hand and squeezes all the blood out of the victim's heart and other organs. The blood is caught in paper-bark baskets, and allowed to dry, and is later partaken of by the Ragalk and his companions. These are usually two or three younger men being instructed in this art of magical killing. Having secured the blood, the Ragalk, by an elaborate process, hides all traces of the operation and restores the victim to consciousness and normal life, so that he returns to camp entirely unaware of what has taken place. Before releasing him, the Ragalk determines how long the victim shall live, which may be for several weeks, and by what means he shall actually die. He may determine that the man shall die from snake-bite, or be speared, or taken by a shark or crocodile, but, whatever happens, it is the Ragalk who is really responsible for the person's death.

682 761 Among these people there is no belief in death from natural causes, so that every death is believed to be the result of evil magic, and steps are immediately taken to determine who is responsible for it. The number of men who are believed to possess this magical power is limited, so it is usually a matter of determining which one of a comparatively small number is guilty. This is done by methods which are utterly unscientific, but which are thoroughly convincing to the aboriginal mind. In this way tribal quarrels and vendettas are begun and continued, and practically every death is followed by a violent upheaval of the tribal life.

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cannibalism which they regarded as indispensable to a hunter in order to maintain his prowess at a level that could earn for him the coveted title of *tjambait*.

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During much of the time—amounting to several years—that I lived in Arnhem Land I hunted with groups of the status of horde, which often claimed one or more *marrngitmirri*. I frequently saw these men practising their cult, and was able to make a detailed study of both *marrngitmirri* and *kalka* while I lived a nomadic life with these people.

Kalka *and* Marrngit

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The cult of the *ragalk* or *kalka—kalk'* of the Burara—, to which I have referred, is believed to be used to bring about the death of a man who has been made a scapegoat—frequently by a rite of augury—for the death of a member of an enemy horde. Often the victim will be a man against whom the deceased or his group have harboured a grievance of long standing, perhaps because he has failed to honour
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some payment such as that obligatory to one who has been present at a *ngarra*—or clan totem—ceremony, to make a ceremonial presentation of *ngata*, food (really vegetable food), or of *gerri*, goods, valuables, to the elders of this clan. Of this obligation they say 'to pay back that *marr*'—to
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propitiate the *malli* of the culture hero whose totem is involved. This *ngata* and the *gerri* presented by men who have attended the *ngarra* by invitation, are dedicated to the *wangarr* and are said to be *yarkomirri*, *i.e.* sacramental. Failure to discharge the obligation to make expiatory payments of the kind that I have mentioned places a man in danger of death by magic, even after a long period of time.

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In Arnhem Land the belief is held that the death of any person in full possession of his social personality is due, not to what the white man terms 'natural causes' but to the act of an enemy, often a person who is believed to bear a grudge, real or imaginary, against the deceased. Even death from sickness or drowning, from attack by shark or crocodile, and especially from snake bite, is not regarded as the primary cause, but merely the agent used by an enemy, or by a *ragalk* whose aid he has enlisted, to bring this about. The only exception to the belief about natural death is extreme old age, when, in the words of one of my informants, the people say 'time belong him now'—his time is spent, he has lived his life. Certain types of swellings
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and deformities are believed to result from ritual visitation or punishment by the *wangarr*, the totemic ancestors, for the violation, even accidental or inadvertent, of a tabu, particularly on the eating of foods which are prohibited at certain critical stages in a man or woman's relation to his family or horde, as at initiation, on the death of near kin, or during pregnancy. Boils of a type distinguished as *marlung* are believed to be due to ritual punishment and so held as proof of the violation of a tabu, usually on the eating of food that is *duyu* (tabu) at critical stages in a man's life.

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A man in east Arnhem Land named Nyarrang pointed to a large tumour on his neck and told me that it was due to the *malli birlma*—*i.e.* a blow from the 'shade' or spirit of an implement called *birlma*—used today as a mallet or hammer in food-preparation by women, and 'found'

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776 originally by the Djangauwo sisters—women culture
[773] heroes, who, in their progress across east Arnhem Land, thrust their yam sticks into the ground as they walked. From each of the holes caused in this way there gushed a spring of water of a special kind called *milmindjarrk*. Certain tabus restrict the drinking of *milmindjarrk* water and my informant Nyarrang declared that the swelling on his neck was due to ritual punishment in the form of a blow from the *malli* of the heavy *birlma*, used by the Djangauwo sisters whose spirits still preside over *milmindjarrk* waters. Some time later, the effect of the blow from the *malli birlma* had become manifest in the form of a swelling. It is characteristic of these people that when 'something is wrong,' when they receive a warning in the
[787] form of an omen or portent, or when 'bad luck' attends their hunting or fishing expeditions, they look back over their lives for some incident which has caused them
[152] uneasiness or concern and which they feel may have incurred the displeasure of the *malli wangarr*, the spirits of the ancestral culture heroes.

756 The role of the *marrngitmirri* is twofold: first, to diagnose sickness or to determine the cause of death, and secondly
[776] to find a scapegoat by the aid of his *marrngit*—who, being
[787] spirits or ghosts, possess occult powers, powers to see things not visible to mortals, which they communicate to the *marrngitmirri*, who in turn passes the information to the kin of the victim. As a rule the verdict of the *marrngitmirri*
[682 is accepted without question and the people proceed to
593] select an avenger. This will be a person within the kinship horizon of the deceased—sometimes a younger brother but often a more distant relation from a clan to which, under an extension of the kinship structure, he has special obligations, which may be reciprocal.

In the marginal area adjacent to the Burara, *i.e.* close to the territorial stronghold of the *ragalk*—the *marrngitmirri*
[764] looks at once for signs of the tell-tale magic of the dreaded *kalka*, just as a man does when seeking the reason for what he accepts as ritual punishment.

754 Even in the culturally homogeneous area of north-east
756 Arnhem Land, the beliefs and ideas about the *marrngit* and
114 *marrngitmirri*, as well as about *ragalk*, vary considerably—necessarily so, in a matter which is strongly subjective. The foregoing reference to the role of the *marrngitmirri* discounts Webb's statement (*loc. cit.*) that this man 'possesses no special influence in the life of his horde or tribe.' It must be apparent that at critical times, when the sentiments of the
[753 kin of a sick or newly deceased man are aroused as they
761] are by the pronouncements of the *marrngitmirri* (which, backed by belief in his *marrngit*, are accepted without question), his influence on the horde in which he lives is one of life and death.

The Kalka *at Work*

754 The *kalka* or sorcerer is believed to be responsible for
753 bringing about the sickness and ultimate death of his
761 victim but he does not profess to diagnose sickness or injury due to magic, which is the role only of the *marrngit*. In practice, *kalka* may operate singly but more generally they work in groups of two or three. A sorcerer is likely

[p. 100(A)]

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● 761] to be named as a scapegoat by the *marrngitmirri* of a neighbouring group when one of its members has died, and to be killed by an avenger who has been presented with a spear, to which is attached a bone, usually a metacarpal bone, taken from the finger of the deceased. One or more of these metacarpal bones are removed after the body has been disinterred. They are cleaned and decorated with the orange-red feathers of the red-collared lorikeet (*Trichoglossus rubritorques*), *lindiritj*. One of these *maidjaballa*, as they are called, is attached by a short string to the head of the spear and becomes an avenger's pennant. When a man is presented with a spear to which the *maidjaballa* is attached in this way, he is charged with the responsibility of killing the scapegoat. This is usually done by catching the victim off guard and spearing him. Sometimes this man may defer the action for a long enough time for the injured sentiments of the group to be appeased, when a potential blood feud may be averted by an expiatory payment or by a formal ordeal by spear.

[768
628] [761] In the practice of his cult the *kalka* is believed by the people of the east to waylay his victim in the bush when he is hunting or to invite him to go on a kangaroo hunt. Sometimes the *kalka* may induce his victim to accompany him by claiming to have already killed and cached a kangaroo—which was too heavy for him to carry back to camp alone.

Once he has succeeded in getting the victim away from his friends, the *kalka* has little difficulty in catching him off guard and overcoming him. Generally he will have made a rendezvous with other *kalka* in the bush. These men overpower their victim by knocking him down, then they open his mouth and pull down his lower lip to expose the alveolar border into which they insert the *kandjurma*—made from a long thin piece of ironwood called *maipin*, or from the long bones of a flying fox or the fibula of a kangaroo, sharpened to a fine point. Informants overlooked the fact that in this approach the *kandjurma* would strike the bone of the mandible or lower jaw. To the distal end of this *kandjurma* is attached a rope of human hair which is placed in a shallow trough of tea-tree bark called *tannia* in which the blood drained from the heart is said to be collected. The *kalka*, now aided by his confederates, has rendered his victim unconscious or comatose. As the *kandjurma* is inserted into the heart, which is approached by way of the dorsal aorta, the victim is said to emit a series of deep husky rasping intakes of breath. Each time this occurs the *kalka* pauses, but as soon as it ceases he thrusts the long, sharply pointed *kandjurma* a little farther down the great vessel towards the heart (*tortork*).[4]

The *kandjurma* is guided and shielded by the left hand of the *kalka* as he uses his right hand to thrust the point down to reach the heart.

Meanwhile one of the *kalka* places the *tannia* close to the victim. He now holds the man's head while the blood runs into it; the *kalka* then grasps his victim around the waist and squeezes his body so that all the blood is drained from it, after which he removes the *tannia* and hides it.

[224
784] The blood collected is made into small parcels wrapped in paper bark and either used in ritual cannibalism or rubbed

[p.100(B)]

754 unaware of what has happened to him, but they assert that because of their magic he is unable to tell of his experiences when he returns to camp, although he knows that he is doomed, and prepares to die.

After a more or less prolonged treatment to restore the victim and to cover external evidence of his work, particularly in obliterating the tracks to the place where the body lay, the *kalka* wraps leaves—any leaves—around the hook of the spear-thrower and waves it over the prostrate body of his victim, especially over his head. The victim stirs. My informant simulated the groans and grunts of a man awakening from a heavy sleep.

As he recovers consciousness, the victim thinks 'I have slept deeply.' He thinks 'I have slept too much.' Meanwhile the *ragalk* has hidden himself behind a tree.

'I think somebody has killed me,' *i.e.* worked magic. The *kalka* now springs out from behind the tree and frightens his victim, telling him that he is doomed and that he will die. The victim recognizes the *kalka* and threatens to kill him. He hooks his spear on his spear-thrower but he misses again and again. He has lost heart. He returns to camp, intending to tell his kin what has happened so that they can avenge him. The *kalka*, joined now by his confederates, waylays the victim, and again harries and intimidates him. The man returns to camp but is unable to tell what has happened to him. In two or three days he [152] falls sick. He feels cold and lies all the time close to a fire. He is resigned to his fate and calling his kin around him he says, 'I am going to finish' (I am going to die).

756 The people, who jump to conclusions, ready to see the *kalka*'s work, call on the *marngitmirri* who holds him tightly, examining his body. He sees sores—the *malli* of the wounds made by the *kandjurma*—and he sees that the heart blood has been drained. If the *marngitmirri* is not sure, not ready to accept responsibility for his diagnosis, he will call in others of his cult, or he will wait until [776] evening, when his *marngit* return to him. These often leave the medicinemen during the day and return to them at night. The *marngit* sit on his shoulders or in the *matji-tji* [415] (biting bag), a net basket made from strings and filled tightly with down feathers or with down (*ramman*). The *matji-tji* is slung around the neck and hangs down on the chest by a string. It is carried by men during formal ordeals called *makarratta*, and when fighting in single combat, when they put it in their mouths and clamp their teeth on it. *Matji-tji* are often worn by *marngitmirri* and provide a place of refuge for their *marngit*. The *marngitmirri*, after initiation to the cult, is able to see his *marngit* and talk to them. The people living in the same camp, although unable to see the *marngit*, claim that they can hear the *kaindjarr*—the sound of swift motion—caused by their wings, or more accurately, since not all use wings as motive power, the sound of motion. The *marngitmirri* [774] claim to be able to detect the work of *ragalk*, but not to ●761] heal their victims, because their heart blood has been [776] drained, the *birimbir* has departed and their internal organs 787] injured or removed.

In the years that I lived with the natives in Arnhem Land I frequently saw the *marngitmirri* at work. He claims

[p.101 (B)]

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he waits till everyone has returned to camp, then he hangs 578
round his neck a string bag stuffed with feathers or bark; and biting on this, and shaking his head from side to side, and glaring fiercely and growling, he rushes out into the open camp. He brandishes his spears, and in a high, tremulously passionate monotone, he hurls defiance and abuse at his offenders. A biting-bag is considered to be an aid to stirring up anger and to impress the audience, but I must admit the practice and the facial contortions have always moved me to unseemly laughter.

Relatives and friends 'shadow' a disputant in every camp quarrel and make a show of stemming his emotions. They are not directly concerned in the disturbance, so they clasp their arms round the middle of the 'growling' relative to suggest that they are holding him back, and in serious cases they may even break his spears or deflect them before they can be thrown. More often than not these 'shadows' are there merely as a matter of form, to lend reality; they make a pretence of holding back the apparently angry, gesticulating warrior who seems to be struggling to get to his enemies. I have often wondered just how ludicrous a contestant would appear if he happened to break away, but they are careful not to struggle hard enough to do this. With amusing ingenuity Marupla, who had acquired a smattering of pidgin English from traders, rushed toward his 'illiterate' opponent waving a handful of spears. With a sidelong glance, to see that I was looking, he shouted in pidgin: 'Good thing white man here, you dead fella long time.'

Nomads cheerfully dice with death; they face it con- 761 ●
tinually, and escape so barely, that their philosophy becomes a cheerful fatalism. From childhood they look calmly into the face of death, so that its bitterness is past or at least reduced to such an extent that in time of excitement they [777] regard almost certain death as a dangerous pleasure. Life is cheap, so cheap that a violent death to any but horde

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relatives and friends is a matter of amusement. It is only possible to die once, and in the ageless wandering through the unbroken round of day and night, the Stone Age fatalist finds his highest form of excitement in continuing a feud, in raiding other hordes, and in other forms of violence, such as capturing women from another man—in itself a profitable pastime. A general raid is the *pièce de résistance*.

Nevertheless I found nomads to be happy and cheerful; they bear pain and disappointment and face death with extraordinary courage. Resilient natures find humour in a mundane primeval world, and they are always on the look-out for something to laugh at—even to the extent of being amused at the contortions of an expiring enemy or at a healthy man's imitation of physical disabilities in another. Youths and men are convulsed with laughter at the antics of a man aping the gait of a leper, and at the uncertain gropings of the partially blind. Jokes are very simple, and the average is no better than a jealous remark about an old man negotiating for youthful wives: 'He must be a turtle', the reference being to the fact that a turtle usually lays several dozen eggs.

Under all this rank growth of primitive emotion lie the roots of qualities we value most in civilized man; such as courage, kindliness, devotion, and honesty. Stone Age man is ordinarily well intentioned toward the welfare of any white man or alien stranded in the bush, and countless stories are told of their rescue of them. In such circumstances they treat them as privileged invalids, and except when bad impressions have been made by previous visitors, they are accepted at face-value. If they act as gentlemen they are treated as such; but if they abuse the hospitality of their hosts, and attempt to rape the women, as has frequently happened, they are exterminated by the only law known to the nomad.

It is impossible to walk through the bush and not notice

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754 several women and children were dead; other sufferers were retching, and rolling on the beach in agony.

When an epidemic of whooping cough from Darwin swept eastwards through Arnhem Land and caused many deaths, [164] a horde on the Crocodile Islands explained that an enemy [776] had released the curse from a tree containing the spirit of the common cough. By stripping the bark from the tree he uncovered the evil spirit and sent it to the camps of his enemies to afflict them. On the other hand he could have broken up the tree, burnt it, and sent the smoke to blow over them.

754 Old Manimba, lame and half-blind, was familiar with
753 magical arts and an acknowledged rain-maker. He also
789 claimed to have control over mosquitoes and boils. Spirits
825 of both plagues inhabit the pandanus palm, and when these
[776] prickly fronds drop off in the wet season the mosquito and boil spirits are released to swarm over the land. Manimba usually gets what he wants by threatening to send some sort of plague. To rouse unseasonal mosquitoes he pulls a green pandanus frond and instructs its mosquito-spirit to swarm into the country of his enemies, and it is done. He can call up boils by making a fire under the palm and directing the smoke to blow over and inflict certain camps.

754 Death in any but the very young or old is attributed to evil
• 761 magic and the first consideration is to fix the blame, for
787 someone must die for it. When a man is killed his lesser
[775] spirit follows the killer. Marrngeit, or benevolent witch-
[756] doctors, claim to be able to see these enslaved ghosts, and they are called on for an opinion. They sometimes make startling revelations to the relatives, though not always without serving their own ends. I remember one marrngeit acted on his own initiative, and asked the relatives: 'Do you know why your brother died?' And when interest and suspicion were fully aroused, he continued, 'I have seen his "mali". It is following Jimunboi, and he must

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have killed him.' At other times the marrngeit is called to examine the body and reconstruct the crime, for by his supernatural powers he can see the marks of the alleged wound, and by sleight of hand he pulls it open to prove his case. He can see the ghost of the killer lurking near the victim's body, or if the body has been disposed of he can still name the killer by an examination of the victim's armlet, spear, or footprints. 754 761 787

Birrinjauwoi of Milingimbi died from pleurisy and was buried before a marrngeit could be brought to examine him. His ornaments and personal possessions were therefore put aside for the autopsy, but when a trickle of moisture came from the lips of the corpse it was hailed as the best specimen of all and was taken to the marrngeit. This marrngeit was a wise man and talked to them and asked questions till he felt sure of their feelings, and then dramatically named the 'killer'.

A youth was killed somewhere in the hills behind Blue Mud Bay, and within three days we heard of it from messengers who ran with the news to us at Yirrkala. They called on the relatives to organize a revenge party, and personal possessions from the corpse were shown and small parts of his flesh distributed. In the emotion which flamed through the country, wailing women incited their men to vengeance. I was reminded of the biblical story of an ancient Hebrew tribe which received parts of a body that had been carved up and sent amongst them to cry for vengeance, and they swept over the hills of Palestine to exterminate a related horde. 628 765

Relics from a dead man are known as 'maiyabala', and consist of finger joints, small bones, fragments of the spear embedded in the body, dried blood, skin, flesh, hair, or ornaments. They are given to relatives as reminders of their obligation to exact blood vengeance and by the very acceptance of them the pact is sealed. A victim's lesser spirit 774 789 765

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Burial Rites and Cannibalism

DEATH and burial customs are much the same from one end of Arnhem Land to the other. Bodies are artistically painted and decorated before they are buried or exposed on platforms or in trees. Later the bones are collected and hoarded by relatives till they feel disposed to deposit them in decorated burial posts. In one district bones are removed from the body and parts of the flesh are eaten in an effort to form a link with the dead. This ceremonial cannibalism is confined to three or four hordes, but all Arnhem Land nomads attempt to communicate with their dead and call on them for assistance.

Mau's young son slipped from an overhanging tree, and in falling into the water struck his head on a canoe. No one saw the accident and he was not missed till his body drifted downstream to the beach. Two youths carried the corpse to the camp, but by coming into contact with it they had attracted its spirit or 'mali', which lodged in their skin. Before they dared to eat any food they must needs free themselves from the ghost by smearing red-ochre on their arms.

That night the entire camp of several inter-related hordes combined in a ceremony conducted by the child's grandfather. Alternately he wailed and sang a prayer to the spirit of his dead brother, the child's tribal grandfather, asking him to come and take the young spirit to the spirit world of 'Buralkor'. The camp set about preventing the spirit or mali from haunting them, and drove it from the camp by switching their bodies with heated leafy twigs.

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horde had for the deceased. In decimated hordes, and in the case of aged and unwanted wives, I have known bodies to be left in the ground and no attempt made to remove them.

Until bones have been collected and a mother is 'purified' she remains smeared with red-ochre and leads an inactive life. Relatives feed her and carry water from the well so that she will not desecrate it, for her child's ghost hovers near her and may attach itself to anything she handles. Similarly the relative who dismembers the body is tabu because of the ghost lodging in his skin, and he also is barred from waterholes and from feeding himself and becomes dependent on the hospitality of the family of the corpse. They are expected to treat him well even to the extent of making presents in return for the favour he has done them in attending to the corpse and running the risk of absorbing the ghost. Consequently there is no difficulty in getting 'grandsons' to run these risks, and the father not infrequently declines several offers and even limits the number of morticians to two or three.

This final purification ceremony is similar to the 'mum-bakuta' described in Chapter 5. Food is deposited in a totemic well conveniently scooped in the sand, and from this a ceremonial meal is eaten by the victims of the tabu and by certain near relatives. Waste food is piled into the well and burnt, to prevent dingoes disturbing it, and the tabu is finally lifted and the ghost removed when the relatives heat leafy twigs in a fire and switch their bodies. Alternatively, water or sand may be poured over the 'unclean' as they stand in the totemic well and smear themselves with red-ochre.

All deaths are regarded with a certain amount of suspicion, but the death of an active warrior is always attributed to sorcery. In such case the body is left in the ground for a very short time before the bones are collected. Smaller ones are